Daily Highlights

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UNITED NATIONS

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THURSDAY HIGHLIGHTS

* Secretary-General expresses concern over Russian DUMA decision to revoke dissolution of former Soviet Union.

* In extremely positive meeting with French President, Secretary-General discusses UN reform and financial crisis.

* Secretary-General says political will to eliminate racial discrimination must be stronger on eve of new century.

* UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Occupied Palestinian territories says he is unable to get Israeli cooperation to fulfil his mandate.

* Ukrainian President and Director-General of UN Office in Geneva discuss cooperation on refugees, Chernobyl and countries in transition.

* Commission on Status of Women urged to call upon governments to prevent those who traffic in women and girls from misusing tourism and advanced information technology.

* Secretary-General expresses satisfaction that Guatemalan parties are suspending offensive military operations.

* Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs in El Salvador to assess state of implementation of peace accords.

* Five UN staff members kidnapped in Somalia.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has expressed concern over a decision of the Russian DUMA to revoke the dissolution of the former Soviet Union. In a statement through his Spokeswoman in Geneva, the Secretary-

General said the resolution, adopted by the Russian DUMA, is at variance with the universally recognized norms of international law, embodied in the Charter of the United Nations.

The Secretary-General said the resolution is not in accordance with the established regional cooperation mechanism, the Commonwealth of Independent States, the members of which are fully recognized and independent Member States of the United Nations. He however expressed confidence that efforts to develop and strengthen regional cooperation in the area will be carried out in conformity with internationally accepted procedures.

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In Paris today, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali met with French President Jacques Chirac in what has been described as a "useful and extremely positive" meeting. UN Spokesman Ahmad Fawzi says they discussed a number of topics: first and foremost was UN reform and the financial crisis of the Organization.

They reviewed negotiations between the United Nations and Iraq on the oil-for-food formula. They also discussed United Nations activities in the former Yugoslavia and other items on the agenda of the Security Council namely a number of African problems and the question of Western Sahara.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has said the political will to eliminate racial discrimination must be stronger on the eve of the new century. In a statement marking the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination being observed today, the Secretary-General said this is why human beings and their rights must be placed at the centre of the concerns of all States and peoples.

Dr. Boutros-Ghali said the commemoration awakens us to the resurgence of racist ideologies and practices, particularly in the economic and social spheres, to the persistence of the subtle forms of racism and racial discrimination that assume the shapes of nationalism or of national or continental preference. He said it also reminds us that the world is not free from xenophobia, hatred and ethnic conflict.

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In Geneva, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights in the occupied Palestinian territories says he is unable to obtain Israeli cooperation to fulfil his mandate. Hannu Halinen told the Commission on Human Rights that as a consequence, he is only able to visit Gaza which is now the headquarters of the Palestinian self-rule authority. He said measures taken by Israel, including closure of its borders due to

security incidents as well as the issue of prisoners and detainees are violations of human rights.

The policy of closure amounts to collective punishment in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention, he said. It creates severe restrictions on the freedom of movement and the freedom of education as well as health concerns. Furthermore, it has an adverse effect on the fragile economic situation, leading to further deterioration in living conditions of the Palestinian population, he added.

The representative of Palestine Nabil Ramlawi told the Human Rights Commission that the Palestinian people had hoped that the current peace process would lead to an improvement in the human rights situation. To the contrary he said, it has deteriorated. The closure of the Palestinian territories has led to the deaths of a number of civilians and has created a state of hunger among the general population.

But Israeli Ambassador Yosef Lamdan said that Israel was at war against terror and was exercising its right of self-defence. He said no self-respecting government would act differently. Israel rejected the assertions that the measures it has been obliged to take are collective punishment or violation of human rights. The measures adopted, including the closure of territories are designed exclusively to prevent armed terrorists prepared to commit suicide from infiltrating into Israel, he said.

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Areas of cooperation between Ukraine and the United Nations were the focus of discussion today between President Leonid Kuchma of Ukraine and the Director-General of the UN Office in Geneva, Vladimir Petrovsky. A statement issued in Geneva today, said particular emphasis was placed on the problems of refugees, international assistance in mitigating the consequences of the Chernobyl accident, providing assistance to the European countries in transition, as well as the Ukrainian contribution to the budget of the United Nations. The two officials also discussed the activities of European regional organizations, including cooperation between the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), in the area of preventive diplomacy.

Mr. Petrovksy outlined the work of the Geneva-based United Nations agencies and bodies and stressed the valuable contribution of Ukraine to United Nations efforts, in particular in the fields of disarmament, peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance.

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The Commission on the Status of Women would call upon governments to prevent those who traffic in women and girls from misusing tourism and advanced information technology, including cyberspace. A draft resolution

exceedingly slowly and problems also remain with the public security sector. While efforts will be made to complete the accords before 30 April, the President acknowledged that there would be elements still pending in some of those areas.

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Five United Nations staff members have been kidnapped in Somalia on Thursday, a UN spokesman has confirmed. The UN workers had just flown into Mogadishu and were picked up at the airfield. Negotiations are still continuing with their captors. The spokesman said an appeal has already been made to the captors to release the staff members expeditiously and unharmed.

Four of the staff members are from the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the fifth from the World Health Organization (WHO).

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